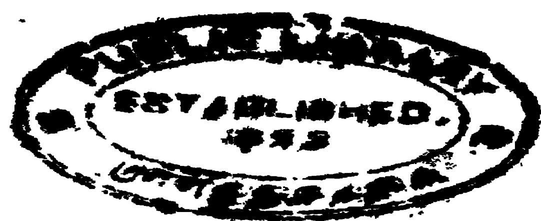


Approved by the Central Text-book Committee, Bengal, as a Supplementary Reader for Class VII of High Schools.

(Vide Calcutta Gazette, June 22, 1939)

HEROES OF BENGAL

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FOREWARD

It is the opinion of a school of modern advanced thinkers that education to be effective should be imparted on national lines. When an English boy cannot thrive on Indian culture and Indian modes of thinking, it stands to reason that an Indian boy will at first find little to interest him in European culture and European modes of thinking. Hence to provide intellectual food on which a young mind can thrive is the duty of every educationist

In Bengal at present we are cofronted with the onerous task of presenting such materials to the young as will rouse their interest. Stories of the Heroes of European history have their interest and educational value ; nay, even fairy tales and fables do some good by stimulating the dull boy ; yet what a storehouse of true and interesting stories is beside us, stories which come home to the Bengali boy. The Bengali boy naturally is eager to know something of the great heroes of his land, whose deeds he faintly remembers, perhaps, to have heard something from his old grand-father. A coward is a bad citizen. It would be a guarantee of good faith to the existing Government and of great prospective benefit to her if we could rouse a martial spirit and true patriotism in our boys. Cosmopolitanism may be the ideal of all

education, but its most practical aim is to rouse in one a sense of national importance. It is only a developed sense of this nationalism that can bind Indians to the interest, not only of India, but of the British Empire— and Empire, of which India is not only an integral but also an important part. A healthy loyalty would result from it.

An attempt has been made here, therefore, of writing an historical reader, in which interest is combined with profit. Hindu and Mahomedan heroes alike have been selected, for all were sons of Bengal and did their duty by her.

Dated the 1st Nov., 1923.
CALCUTTA.

AUTHOR.

CONTENTS

Sir P. C. Roy writes :—

"For Prof. H. K. Sarkar
In haste

The other day I came across your "Heroes of Bengal" accidentally at an H. E. School near our native village and was struck with it. Hope there will be more like it from your pen."

P. C. ROY

INTRODUCTORY

DEAR boys and girls, I know that you love to hear tales. So I shall tell you a few, but they will not be like those that you have heard about fairies and ghosts and beasts. You are now grown up, and now that beasts cannot talk, and that fairies and ghosts are not met with in this world, I think you would rather hear of man and his deeds than anything else. If you are good boys and girls, and if you love your land, you will like to hear tales of the great men who lived there and left their stamp on it. Such a great man is a hero. I shall choose a few of these men and tell you how they lived, what they did, and how good and great they were.

Let me begin with one who lived not long ago, whose ways of life were, therefore, like yours. This hero is Colonel Suresh Biswas.

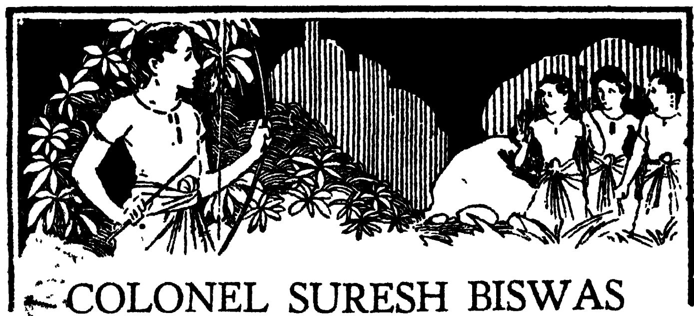
"WHEN THE MIND IS WITHOUT FEAR AND THE HEAD IS HELD HIGH ;

WHERE KNOWLEDGE IS FREE ;

WHERE THE MIND IS LED FORWARD BY THEE INTO EVER-WIDENING THOUGHT AND ACTION—

INTO THAT HEAVEN OF FREEDOM, MY FATHER, LET MY COUNTRY AWAKE."

--**Rabindranath**



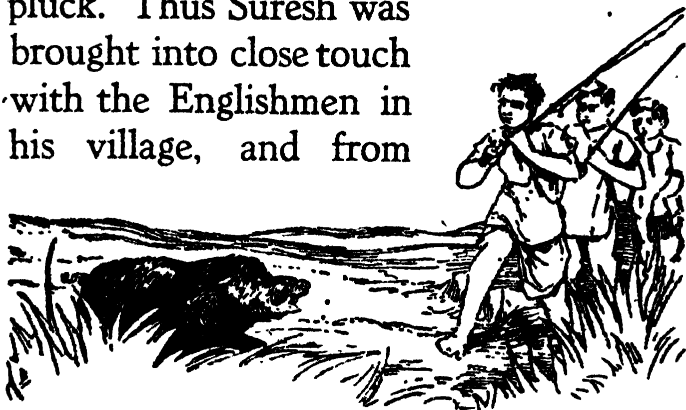
COLONEL SURESH BISWAS

SURESH BISWAS was born in 1861 at a village not far from Krishnagar. Even as a child Suresh began to show signs that he would be a hero. He never knew what fear was and his love of adventure grew in him daily. When quite young, he was brought to Calcutta and admitted into a school where he took more pains to develop his body than to train his mind. With his school-fellows he passed a merry time. He led them in mock attacks on forts, himself playing the part of the hero. At the age of eleven he was known to all for his fearlessness.

There were a few English indigo-planters in his native village. One day three of these men gave chase to a wild boar. It was nearly dark and Suresh, who had gone with two companions to fish in a pond near by, was returning home. The wild boar rushed out in front of them. The huntsmen tried to warn the boys of their danger, but the warning was too late. Presence of mind alone could save the situation. Pushing his companions aside, Suresh ran, rod in hand, to meet the boar. By a quick movement he got out of the way of the on-rushing fierce monster and struck it such blows even with his fishing-rod that the beast rolled on to its side. In a trice the dogs were on it. The men came up and made a prize of the boar.



They spoke highly of the Bengali boy's pluck. Thus Suresh was brought into close touch with the Englishmen in his village, and from



them he learned to speak English with great ease.

As you may guess, a boy with such animal spirit could not shine at school. His neglect of his studies was not to the liking of his father, who, therefore, often chid him. The head of the school, Mr. Ashton, tried hard to make him mend his ways. But he had now become so wild that he threw off his old love of Hinduism and at the tender age of thirteen, in a fit of spite, gave up his faith and turned Christian.

Now the trials of his life began. He left school and set out in search of work. He got a petty post in Calcutta, but the work proved too tame for a boy of his nature. He had already formed vague schemes of going to England, and this desire made him restless. He first visited Rangoon, then Madras, and returned to Calcutta to devise means of getting to England. He was only sixteen, but the trials he had been through had made him wise. Like a good lad he tried to mend his ways, and began to study privately so that he might be fit for life.

After some time Suresh got an opportunity of fulfilling his desire to visit England. He struck up an acqaintance with the captain of a ship bound for London. The captain took a fancy to the youth because of his frankness and gave him the post of a steward on board his ship. So Suresh reached England. Here he tried his hand at many jobs for

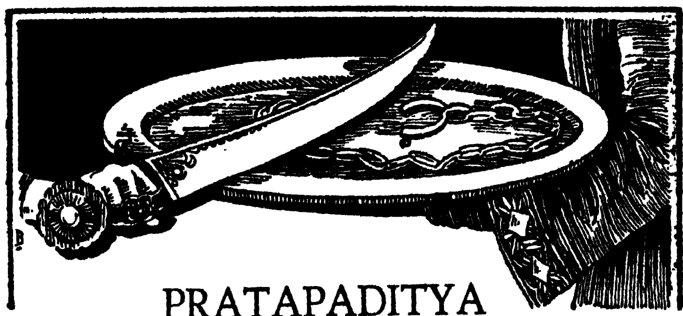
a living. At last he joined a circus troupe, toured through Europe, and won fame as a daring tamer of wild beasts. In 1885 he left Europe and went to the United States of America with another circus troupe. In course of time he came to Brazil, a country in South America, where he won great fame. Suresh was no longer the wild boy of his youth. He was master of several tongues and held many responsible posts. He was the caretaker and trainer of animals in the Royal Zoological Garden at Rio de Janerio, the capital of Brazil.



In 1887 he enlisted as a soldier. Being a foreigner his promotion was at first slow. He became a Corporal at Santa

Cruz and was then sent to the war hospital at Rio de Janerio. Here he learnt surgery. From Corporal he rose to be First Lieutenant and was put in command of a company. As a Lieutenant Suresh took a prominent part in the famous battle of Natheroy. This was the height of fame to which he rose. He married a Brazilian lady, and lived in peace and honour till his death in 1905.

Colonel Suresh Biswas was the first Bengali in modern times to enter the military profession and to shine in it. Before his time, the Bengalis had a bad name as a tame race and were shut out from the army. In the late war with the Germans, his noble example was followed by Bengalis who readily shed their blood .for their King-Emperor. When the Bengalis recall with pride the glories of the Bengali Regiment, they should remember that it was Suresh who paved the way for them.



PRATAPADITYA

DEAR children, I am sure that the last story will have left you with a high opinion of the Bengalis. I shall now tell you another story of a great King, from which you will learn that not long ago the Bengalis were such a warlike race that they tried even to wrest the rule of India from the powerful Mughal Emperors.

I dare say you already know King Pratapaditya of Bengal by name at least. The districts of Jessore and Khulna and the Sunderbans were the scenes of his activities. Pratap lived towards the close of the 16th century, the period when the Mughals had seized India and were slowly driving out the Pathans.

Pratapaditya was born of Hindu Kayestha parents about the year 1560. He was the son of Bikramaditya (also called Sri Hari), a high official of Dayud Shah, a Pathan ruler of Bengal. On Dayud's death he became the owner of extensive lands. Pratap's mother died soon after he was born, but his aunt brought him up tenderly.

During childhood Pratap was gentle, but as he grew up he became rather wild and haughty. He was very intelligent and it is said that he soon mastered Sanskrit, Bengali and Persian. He was a great lover of physical exercise and was keen on learning the use of weapons. His uncle, Basanta Ray, and other able masters taught him this art. He



often went a-hunting in the Sunderbans. He could shoot birds on the wing and kill ferocious animals. In his adventures he had two well-loved and devoted friends, Sankar and Suryyakanta.

His father did not approve of this harum-scarum life and often took him to task. Thinking that he would mend his ways, his father had him married to an accomplished girl, Sarat Cumari by name. This marriage, however, did not tame the sprit of the young hero. Heroes are born not for the hearth, but for fields of action.



Bikramaditya sent Pratap with gifts to the court of Akbar, who was then reigning as Emperor at Agra. At the court he heard every one talking of Rana Pratap Sinha of Chitor who was standing out so heroically against Akbar. The young heart of Pratapaditya was all on fire to follow in the footsteps of Rana

Pratap. He there formed the secret resolution to wrest Bengal at least from the Mughal sovereign. With this ambition he returned to Bengal. His father, a clever man, foresaw the greatness of his son and entrusted him with the rule of his dominions. Pratap at once began to adopt such measures as would strengthen his position.

It was during this time that Bengal was a prey to the attacks of the Mugs and Arrakanese and Portuguese pirates (called Feringhees). These pirates raided by rivers the districts of Barisal, Khulna and the 24 Parganas. They were very cruel and would plunder and burn down villages. The men whom they captured they either killed or sold as slaves, or forced them to turn pirates. The women were treated brutally and then sold as slaves.

Pratap knew that unless he could free the country of these pirates it could not

be prosperous ; so he built many forts and ships, and succeeded in checking them.

While Pratap was busy setting his kingdom in order, a striking event took place which gave Pratap new energy and won for him the sympathy of his subjects. He had just chosen Dhumghat as the site of his new capital. On that site the image of the goddess Kali, Jessoreswari was discovered. Pratap was religiously-minded. In this incident he saw a promise of divine help, and he was infused with a new spirit. The people too looked on Pratapaditya as the favoured child of the goddess and destined to be a great ruler.

Pratap now tried to give effect to his old resolution. He knew that if the Hindu chiefs, who were faithful to Akbar, could see there was life in Bengal, they would quickly veer round. Moreover, the Pathans could be used against

the Mughals. So Pratap made a bold attempt to regain power and glory for the Hindus. He had already erected many forts, manned a strong fleet, and put his able friends Sankar Chakravarty and Suryya Kanta, in charge of civil and military affairs. He had trained an army. His Kuki-troops, drawn from the hill-tribes, were specially hardy men who had peculiar methods of warfare. His infantry was far-famed. He had taken into service several foreigners and these men proved very able and faithful servants. He had good arsenals where even guns were cast. He now began to match his strength against that of the Mughals.

Man Sinha, the famous Rajput general of Akbar, who was sent to Bengal to establish order there, found Pratapaditya in possession of the greater part of the country. He marched out to meet Pratap at Jessore, and after crossing the river

Kalindi encamped at Basantapur. The place is not far from Dhumghat, which was then the capital of Pratap ; and near it was another fort, that of Mukundapur.

Man Sinha now sent messenger to Pratapaditya's court with a sword and a chain. These were set before Pratap and the messenger said, "Raja Man Sinha intends one of those as a gift for you. Choose one of them." Pratap was angry. He ordered one of his officers to take the sword. The officer did as he was ordered ; and with a show of spirit said, "Carry the chain back to your worthy master. It will become his feet better than the feet of any one else." I am sure that you have guessed that the chain meant submission and the sword war.

Now came the actual war. It was a hard struggle which lasted for several days. Man Sinha had the worst of it at first, but in the end he was victorious. Three days' actions are worthy of mention.

The battle on the first of these days, fought near Basantapur, was indecisive. It resulted in heavy losses to both sides. The second day's battle was a hard-fought one. In this battle Suryyakanta was killed and Sankar severely wounded. The honours rested with Man Sinha who captured the fort of Mukundapur. The enemy, therefore, marched quickly to Dhumghat, where the third day's battle was fought. In this battle Pratap was defeated and lost his able officer, Feringhee Rodda. He now came to terms with Man Sinha. He had suffered heavy losses both by deaths in action and treachery.

Pratap was not long left in peace. After Akbar's death the Emperor Jahingir in 1608 sent Islam Khan to reduce Bengal, which was again giving trouble. The Bhunya rulers had rebelled. Pratap at first promised to help Islam Khan. But on second thought he decided not to do

so. This made Islam Khan angry, and he marched at once against Pratap. A battle followed and Pratap lost a trusty general, Kamal Khoja. This loss brought about the fall of Pratap. Weakened by domestic quarrels and constant wars



Pratap surrenders

Pratap sued for peace. His present enemy, however, was not the noble Rajput, Man Sinha, but the vengeful Islam Khan. Pratap's offers were rejected and the fight continued. Pratap and

his troops displayed great skill and valour, but to no purpose. They had to fall back and retire within the fort and the Mughals won the day. One of Pratap's chief supporters, Jamal Khan, a Pathan chief went over to the side of the enemy and this shattered his last hopes and he surrendered. He was thrown into prison at Dacca and after some time sent to Agra as a captive in an iron cage. But all accounts agree in stating that he never reached the place, for he died on the way at Benares.





MIR MADAN AND MOHAN LALL

DEAR boys and girls, in the last two tales you have seen that Bengal was a land that always had produced heroic sons. Suresh Biswas showed what mettle modern Bengalis have, if only suitable opportunities are given to them. Pratapaditya showed that the martial spirit is natural to the Bengalis. I am now going to tell you a short story of two Bengali heroes who flourished so late as the latter half of the 18th century.

I am speaking of the time when the English came to Bengal to trade and

were gradually drawn into conflict with the Nawab of Bengal. Sirajuddaulah, an imprudent young man, was then the Nawab. He had an uncle, Mir Jafar by name. This man was selfish and treacherous. He was plotting with the English to dethrone Siraj and to become the Subadar of Bengal himself. Sirajuddaulah was not on good terms with the English, and matters were soon sliding from bad to worse. A battle with the English was imminent. Siraj now sent his army to Plassey under several heroic leaders, amongst whom were Mir Madan and Mohan Lall. Clive was at the head of the English. He was hesitating to risk a decisive battle with Siraj's immense army. At last Mir Jafar's secret promise of help was received and Clive prepared for the battle.

Clive posted his men in a mango-grove called Lakshabag after the lakhs of mango trees planted there. At day-break,

the Nawab's army marched towards the grove and it looked as if they would surround the handful of British troops. The army of Siraj presented a grand and formidable appearance with their elephants gorgeously decorated, their drawn swords glittering in the sun, their heavy cannon in position and their standards flying. About 8 o'clock Mir Madan opened fire, and he soon made it very hot for the English troops. Such a shower of balls poured upon them from Siraj's fifty cannon that the English had to retire behind the trees.

Clive was afraid of the issue and regretted having taken the risk. Umichand, a plotter against Siraj, assured Clive that the fight would not last long, as it was being waged by only one section of the troops, namely, that led by faithful Mir Madan and Mohan Lall. All the other sections, he said, would not join in the fight.

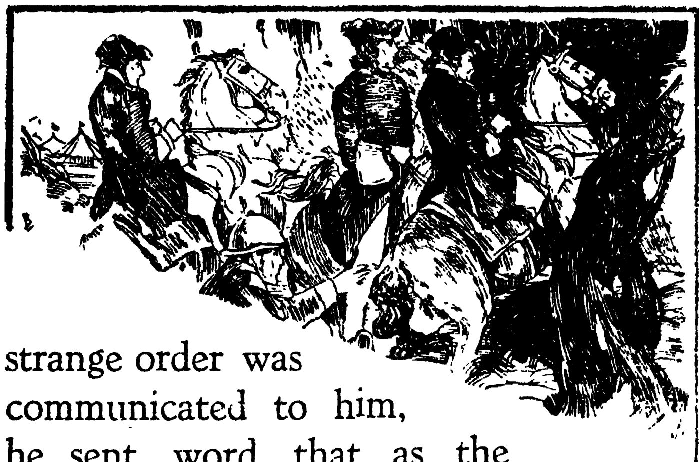
Meanwhile Mir Madan was advancing slowly and cannonading furiously. Mir Jafar and his troops were standing by, but did not take any part in the action. About 11 o'clock Mir Madan was pressing the English so hard that Clive consulted his officers and decided on defence under cover of the trees as far as that was possible. No attack before nightfall was advised. At this time, as fate would have it, the sky became overcast with rain-clouds and there was a heavy shower. Mir Madan's powder was not covered and much of it got wet. Mir Madan had to slacken his fire. But nothing daunted, he began to prepare for another great effort. A cannon-ball now struck Mir Madan in the thigh and shattered it. The Bengali hero had done his duty. He was carried into the presence of Siraj and after uttering these few words, "Though the English retreated behind the mango trees, not one of your generals is

fighting," he fell dead. Siraj's hopes were now crushed, for he had relied on Mir Madan and had given no ear to the intrigues against him.



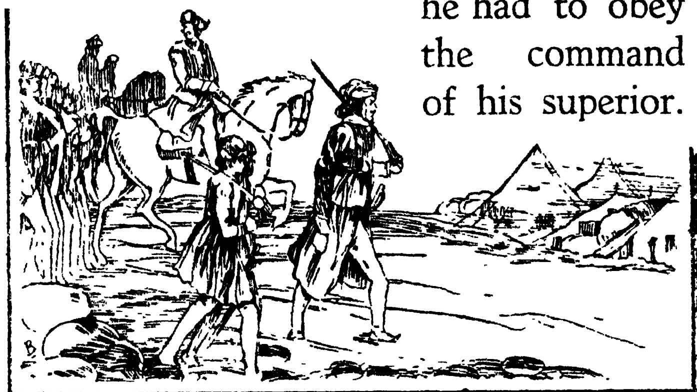
Mohan Lall, the other Bengali hero, now took command of the Nawab's troops. He was an able second to Mir Madan. Meanwhile Mir Jafar had advised Siraj to withdraw his troops for the day. Siraj ordered his troops to retire. Mohan

Lall was at the time marching upon the English with great spirit. When this



strange order was communicated to him, he sent word that as the fight would be finished within a few hours, it was not prudent to retire then. He knew that if he retired ever so little, it would dis-hearten his troops and that the disorder that would spread might result even in disaster. Hence he wanted to fight it out. On learning this Mir Jafar once more induced the Nawab to repeat his order. Mohan Lall was much angered and grieved when

for the second time he received the order to retire ; but as a subordinate he had to obey the command of his superior.



He marched his forces slowly towards his camp in as orderly a manner as possible. The English seized the opportunity, and charged the retiring troops of the Nawab. Confusion prevailed and the battle of Plassey was lost and won.

The calm heroism of Mir Madan and Mohan Lall will be remembered as long as the battle of Plassey lives in the memory of man. Their faithfulness to their master was exemplary.



MIR KASIM

YOU have learnt how, through the treachery of Mir Jafar, the battle of Plassey was won by the English. He was made Nawab of Bengal, but he was old and infirm and unable to look after affairs. He could not pay the very large sums he had promised the English for his elevation to the Nawabship. Hence the English deposed him and put his son-in-law, Mir Kasim on the throne in 1760.

Mir Kasim was a very able and intelligent man. He was also somewhat patriotic. He wanted to rule for himself. This could only be done by shaking off the yoke of the English. He, therefore, set his heart upon driving them out. In a short time he amassed money by raising

taxes and cutting down expenses. With this object in view he began to train an army. He transferred his capital from Murshidabad to Monghyr, as Murshidabad was so near to the English that they could observe his intrigues.

Not very long after this, an actual quarrel broke out between the English and Mir Kasim. The East India Company, on payment of a sum of Rs. 3000 a year, were allowed to trade in Bengal ; it paid no other duties. This privilege, however, was granted to the Company only as a Company and not to any of its servants individually. The privilege was soon abused. Many of the officers of the Company carried on private trade, and escaped taxation by sheltering themselves under this privilege. Mir Jafar had connived at this. But Mir Kasim was a strong man. He objected to this abuse, and when the servants of the Company obstinately declined to pay taxes, Mir

Kasim abolished the taxes on trade altogether. This helped the native traders, but hurt the East India Company, for competition with private traders now grew keen.

Hence the English entered into war with Mir Kasim. He was repeatedly defeated, and at last fled to Oudh. There he sought the help of its powerful Nawab. The Nawab of Oudh and the Emperor of Delhi, Shah Alam, supported Mir Kasim. The English met the enemies at Buxar in Behar in 1764. Mir Kasim was defeated and reduced to a helpless condition and it is said that he died in great misery.

Mir Kasim's claim to be a hero lies in this that his love of Bengal made him bold enough to attempt to wrest supremacy from the grasp of the British traders. Moreover, he was not a time-server. He had the courage to oppose the abuse by its officers of the privilege granted to the East India Company.



SHER SHAH

I feel sure that most of you must at least have heard the name of Sher Shah, one of the great names in the history of Bengal. You also know how he came by the title "Sher" (i.e. a tiger), for did he not kill a ferocious tiger when he was but a youth ? This famous hero was at first called Farid Sur. His father was an ordinary Jagirdar (holder of lands for which no revenue was to be paid) of Bihar. But his son gave early promise of greatness. He was educated at Jaunpur where he became proficient in Arabic and Persian and showed great talent. He won the favour of the Mussulman

King of Jaunpur; but this made him many enemies. He had to flee for his life from Jaunpur.

It was at this time that the last Pathan Emperor of Delhi, Ibrahim Lodi, was defeated by Babar at the battle of Panipat, and that Babar founded the Mughal Empire. Sher went to the court of Babar, and while there, studied the Mughals and saw the possibility of driving them out of India. At length he left Babar's court. A story is told how Sher incurred the displeasure of the Mughals.

Once Babar and his chiefs were dining. Sher also had been invited to the feast. Being an outsider and a dependent Sher was often made the butt of their jokes by the Mughals. On this occasion a huge peace of meat was served to Sher who had no carving knife with him. The chiefs; therefore, enjoyed the situation. You will understand the reason of their mirth if you have read the fable of the

fox and the stork supping together. The chiefs were so much amused that they burst into laughter. This annoyed Sher much and with great spirit he unsheathed his sword and carved the meat. His presence of mind and his spirit saved him from being made a laughing-stock any more. But Babar was offended and took the drawing of the sword in his presence as an insult.

Sher had been long thinking of leaving Babar's court. This event hastened his departure. He became a bitter enemy of the Mughals. Sher had seen the need of an able leader to unite the Pathans. He was aware of his own powers and set himself to carry out his plan. He secured the help of many small chiefs and his first step was to seize Chunar. He then made himself master of Bihar and laid siege to Gauda, the capital of Bengal. The king of Bengal, a son of Hossain Shah, appealed for help to Humayun who had succeeded

his father, Babar, as Emperor at Delhi. Humayun hastened to meet him, but Sher thought it wise not to measure his strength with that of the Emperor at once. So he fell back upon and took shelter in Chota-Nagpur. He was full of pluck, and undaunted by the check he had received, he planned the taking of the strong fort of Rohtas on the river Soane as a base for operations against Humayun. But the fort was held by Raja Hari Krishna.

Sher sent a messenger to the Raja to enquire if he would take charge of and protect Sher's family and wealth. This trick had the desired effect and Raja Hari Krishna consented to receive the family of Sher. Sher sent a thousand covered palanquins, most of which contained well-armed soldiers. The Raja thought that they were the *Pardanashin* ladies of the family of Sher and their attendants, and ordered that they should be admitted in the fort. When in, these

soldiers straightway fell upon the guards of the fort and seized the fort for Sher.

Sher could now easily harass Humayun without any risk to his family, as he was in possession of this strong fort. He was so successful in his wars with Humayun that he wrested the throne of Delhi from him. It is said that Humayun's Empress fell into the hands of Sher Shah. But Sher had a noble heart. He could meet cunning with cunning. Yet he knew that God gives success only to those who are really noble. Sher, therefore, treated the Empress as he would have treated his own mother, and later sent her properly escorted to Humayun. Sher had already assumed the tittle of Shah, or ruler of Bengal ; he now styled himself Emperor of Delhi (1540). Sher Shah was soon engaged in several wars. He conquered Malwa, took the fort of Raisan, invaded Marwar, and reduced its king to submission. He then laid siege to Kalinjor.

While he was looking after the batteries a powder magazine exploded and Sher was severely burnt. It is said that such was his strength of mind that in the midst



of his pain he continued to direct the siege. It was only when the place was taken that he cried out, "Thanks to the Almighty" and passed away.

Whatever might be said against Sher Shah's ambition, it must be admitted that his rule was popular. Though he did not reign long and though most of his reign was taken up with wars, yet there was perfect order in the country. He introduced many improvements in the government ; it is said that even Akbar was indebted to Sher Shah for his excellent system of Government. He built a high road from Bengal to the Indus, with inns at every stage and wells at short distances apart and planted trees on both sides of the road. Facilities for Hindu travellers were also provided by him. In short, Sher Shah, by his wise and sympathetic rule, won the hearts of all and his claim to the gratitude of Bengal will ever remain strong.



GIASUDDIN

LONG ago (in the 14th century) a mad and cruel Emperor named Muhammad Tughlak reigned at Delhi. He was such a bad ruler that the governors of various provinces tried to throw off their yoke and some succeeded and became independent rulers. There was great disorder in Bengal at this time. A clever Pathan, seizing the opportunity, occupied Bengal and began to rule as an independent sovereign. Giasuddin was the grandson of this Pathan ruler. He proved a very good king and by his strict justice he won the hearts of the people. There

were at the time few rulers as upright and just as Giasuddin. It is said that once while hunting, one of his arrows



accidentally wounded a young man. The aged mother of this man sued the King before the Chief Judge (the Kazi). The Kazi was also a very upright man and never shrank from his duty. He passed sentence upon the King and ordered him to pay full compensation to

the old woman. The King was much pleased and at once paid the fine imposed. When leaving the court he drew his sword and said to the Judge, "If to-day you had failed to punish me as I am King, I would have beheaded you with this sword of mine." The Kazi showing the King a cane retorted, "If you had disobeyed me to-day, I would have flogged you with this cane. I am glad that both of us have come through this trial of God."

The example of a good king is always followed by his subjects throughout his kingdom and Giasuddin attracted good officers to his service.

He reigned for about six years and died towards the close of the 14th century A. D. Several mosques were built during his reign.

It is a pity that very few details of his reign have come down to us, but though so little is known of Giasuddin, Bengal cherishes the memory of this upright ruler.



RAJA GANESH

YOU will now read the story of two great rulers of Bengal who are held in high regard by her, though very meagre and conflicting accounts of their lives have come down to us. In the days of the Pathan rule, Bengal was a neglected province. The Emperors ruled at Delhi far from Bengal ; their empire was so large and the means of communication were so undeveloped that they could not always control Bengal. Hence from time to time, there arose petty chiefs. Some of them became more powerful than others and ruled as kings of Bengal. Raja Ganesh was a King of this sort. He was at first a mere land-holder of Dinajpur.

In course of time he became so powerful that in 1405 he killed the grandson of Giasuddin and seized the throne of West Bengal. He was a Hindu and reigned with great ability and tact. Though his subjects were both Hindus and Mussulmans, yet his fatherly rule won the hearts of all.

At the time of Raja Ganesh, Bengal was much harassed by the Pathans. Raja Ganesh always took the side of the people and never shrank from the wrath of the Pathans. The life and property of men and the virtue of women were unsafe at that time. Many stories of how he saved people from dishonour have grown up round his name.

It is said that once Raja Ganesh came upon Alim Shah (the heir-apparent of the Pathan ruler of Bengal) when he was going to kidnap a beautiful young Hindu maiden. Nothing daunted, Raja Ganesh fought single-handed and saved the

maiden from Alim Shah and his ruffian soldiers. Alim Shah, balked of his prey, threatened revenge.

Raja Ganesh was next day summoned to the court to answer charges brought against him. He attended, but took his seat where accusers usually sat. The Sultan and Alim Shah were on the dais. When Alim Shah noticed where Raja Ganesh had taken his seat, he ordered him to take his place in the dock for there the accused always stood. Thereupon Ganesh Narayan retorted, "Why should I be there ; who is my accuser ?"

Alim Shah answered, "I am your accuser."

"Then you should come down from the dais of the court and stand as an ordinary subject in the accuser's place," said Raja Ganesh.

Alim Shah was silent, and much piqued.

The Sultan now proceeded with

the case. Raja Ganesh was charged with treason for killing the Sultan's soldiers when they were on duty.



"I did it in self-defence" was the Raja's calm reply to the charge.

Sultan. Were you attacked by them without any reason ?

Raja. No, they had a very good reason; they were ordered by Alim Shah to attack me.

Sultan. Would Alim Shah give such an order without sufficient reason ?

Raja. I am here to explain that exactly and to charge Alim Shah. Come down,

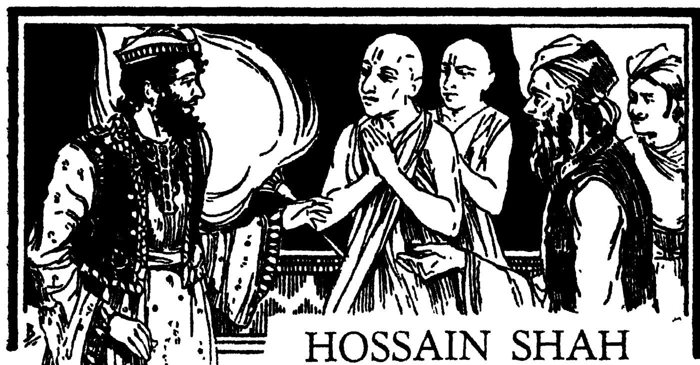
Alim Shah and take your stand in the dock that I may openly charge you.



This bold attitude won the applause of the court. The Sultan was highly pleased and the affair was amicably settled.

Whatever truth may underlie stories of this sort, it is a fact that under Raja Ganesh, Bengal enjoyed the effects of good rule. His untiring zeal for the good of his country was remarkable. The Pathans were kept in check and his subjects lived in peace.

Though history throws very little light upon the events of Raja Ganesh's rule, yet Bengal has not forgotten his yeoman service and will ever esteem him as one of her heroes.



HOSSAIN SHAH

THE descendants of Raja Ganesh were not as able as he was and so power slipped from their hands about the year 1445. Bengal then remained without a good ruler for some time, till in 1494 Hossain, a Pathan of the noble Syad family, seized the throne of Bengal.

It is recorded in some Vaishnava books that Hossain Shah was a servant at first, and that his master was a Government officer. But it is said that Hossain was once lashed by his master, but that he bore the indignity patiently and always tried to please him. This brought him into great favour with that officer. With his help Hossain entered Government

service and by his abilities gadually rose to power.

During the rule of Hossain Shah Bengal recovered her former glory. He was a very heroic king. He fought with the kings of Jaunpur and Kamrup and wrested from them those portions of Bengal which they had seized when Bengal was under weak rulers.

Hossain Shah also made arrangements to secure the peace of Bengal. He made a free gift of land in Midnapur to warlike Abyssinians so that the chiefs of Orissa could not invade Bengal. He entered into a treaty with the Emperor of Delhi, and thus freed Bengal from all possible sources of trouble.

Hossain was a lover of learning and encouraged art and literature. '*Paragali Bharat*' is a famous poem and it was written under his patronage. Hossain Shah's activities, when the country was at peace, were many-sided. He was always

bent on doing good to his subjects. He built several highways and inns for the convenience of travellers. He was perhaps the best of all the Pathan rulers of Bengal save Giasuddin. Though Hossain Shah was a Mohammedan he was very tolerant. Many Bengali Hindus were employed by him. The Rajas of Saptagram were amongst his officers. Two Brahmins also. Rup and Sanatan, held high offices during his rule. It was during his time that the great Hindu reformer Chaitanya began to preach. Hossain did not put a stop to his activity. Even his officers, Rup and Sanatan, embraced the new religion. Many Mohammedans also were converted but Hossain Shah never interfered.

After a glorious reign of nearly fifty years, Hossain Shah died about 1520. His benign rule and equal treatment of all his subjects, Hindu and Mohammedan, endeared him to Bengal and she is still proud of him.



RAJA SITARAM ROY

YOU have heard the life-story of Pratapaditya of Jessore,—how brave and spirited he was, and how he fought for the independence of Bengal. He was not however, the last Hindu hero who tried to win the glory of independence for Bengal. I shall tell you now of Raja Sitaram Roy who made the last brave attempt to free Bengal from its foreign yoke. As Pratap was the hero of the South of Bengal, Sitaram was the hero of the North. Sitaram lived nearly 100 years later than Pratap, about the time of Aurangazeb, the last great Mughal Emperor. Sayastha Khan was the subadar

(Governor) of Bengal. Udainarayan, the father of our hero, was an ordinary Tashilder. His mother, Dayamayi (or kind-hearted) by name, was a spirited woman. It is said that, sword in hand, she once kept at bay a band of dacoits. Sitaram was born about the year 1658. Very little has been recorded of his early life. He passed his early childhood in his maternal uncle's house. He studied Sanskrit in a *Tol* (an old fashioned Sanskrit school). Bengali was not properly studied then, nor was there much Bengali literature worth the name. Sitaram, however, knew Bengali well. He delighted in reciting from memory verses from Jaydeb and Chandidas. This power he retained to the end of his life, and he often entered into competition with others in recitation.

According to the custom of those days he learnt Arabic and even Persian. Urdu was then the *linguc franca* of India.

Sitaram had great command of Urdu and Persian. He could speak Urdu fluently. But his whole heart was drawn more towards the heroic than towards the fine arts. He was very skilful in handling weapons. He was an expert in the use of clubs. He was also a good rider. When he was a full-grown youth, he used to frequent the court at Dacca. Sayastha Khan appreciated his courage and his skill in using weapons. It is said that Sitaram once offered his services in putting down a rebellious Pathan hero. The offer was accepted and he succeeded in killing the Pathan and quelling the rebellion. The Nawab bestowed upon him the Jagir of Naldi Pargana on the understanding that he would free it from robbers and pirates.

You already know from the story of Pratapaditya, how Bengal was infested by Mug pirates. Though checked for a time by Pratapaditya, they again became

strong and pillaged villages. This was only one of the scourges that ravaged Bengal. The Pathans by their frequent revolts disturbed the peace of the land. Weak rule resulted in robbers and thieves again infesting the land. The Jagir, bestowed upon Sitaram, had been almost deserted by its inhabitants owing to these causes.

Sitaram now set about his task. Just as Pratapaditya had been helped by two intimate friends, so also was Sitaram by two very able and trusty friends, Muniram Roy and Ramrup Ghosh. Ramrup was a stalwart, muscular man with the strength of a giant. He was an inhabitant of Naldi. With his help and that of the reformed pirate Bactior Khan, Sitaram entered on his task. He worked untiringly and vigorously. He had often to rove about in boats with followers ready-armed. Through Bactior and his followers he found out the secret move-

ments of the pirates. The pirates were practically driven out even from the Sundarbans. In those days dacoits used to send notice of their intended attacks. Sitaram was always ready to meet and to rout them. Hence the title of the tutelary deity of the village, god *Nisanath* (the Lord of the Night) was conferred on him. This weeding out of dacoits from the country brought peace and comfort to the villagers, and the people began to compare themselves with the subjects of the great ruler Hossain Shah, of whom you have already read.

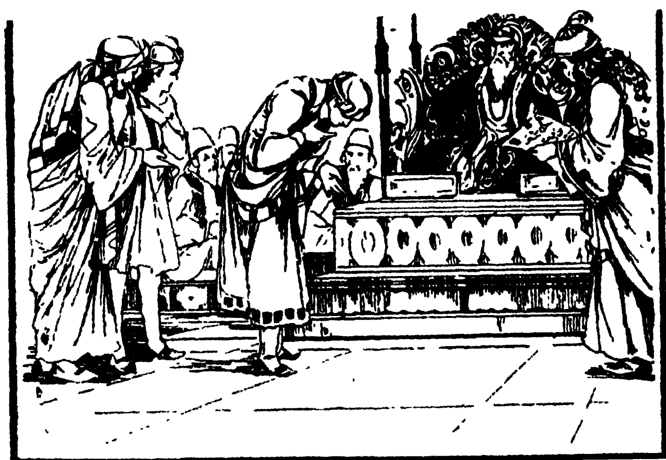
Sitaram was now the regular lord of Naldi Pargana. He built a palace at Naldi ; the ruins of this palace are still to be seen near Muhammadpur. So famous had Sitaram already become as a leader that he had no difficulty in enlisting recruits. People then had the martial spirit and they always flocked round able leaders. Sitaram also fortified a

site and there built barracks for his soldiers.

Like Pratap, Sitaram also was a deeply religious man. After he had established himself at Muhammadpur, (formerly called Suryyakundu and Harihar), he erected a temple to a goddess. This temple was a famous one, and mention of it was made in the Vaishnava songs of Gorachand.

Sitaram now lost parents. He performed their funeral ceremonies with great pomp. About a year, Sitaram went on a pilgrimage with his friends Ramrup and Maniram. After offering *pindas* at Gaya, he went to Agra with gifts for the Mughal Emperor. Sayastha Khan, the Mughal Viceroy of Bengal, had already sent the Emperor reports of Sitaram's success in quelling pirates. Now, in recognition of his services, he was given the title of Raja. He returned to Dacca and had his title confirmed by the Subadar.

Sitaram was in need of a suitable capital. He made it at Bagjan and called it Muhammadpur. The place was one of Nature's strongholds, surrounded as it was on three sides by marshes and the river Madhumati. The middle portion



Sitaram receiving the Sanad

was raised land, fit for habitation. The open southern side was protected by a ditch dug for the purpose. The site moreover was well placed as it was very near the barracks of the soldiers mentioned above. Sitaram, as if to consecrate

the place, founded a temple, dedicated to the god Lakshminarayan. The name given to the capital was a Muhammedan one, probably with a view to win the sympathy of his Muhammedan subjects and followers. The capital was protected by a well-planned fort, square in shape and made of earth-work. Ruins of this magnificent fort are still to be seen. He set apart a quarter of his capital for blacksmith families, skilled in casting guns. There was also a market. Tanks were a special feature of the capital. There was a large tank called *Ramsagar Dighi.* A smaller but a pretty tank was said to contain Sitaram's immense treasures carefully hidden away. The Ramsagar is a magnificent reservoir of water. It still exists, free of weeds and full of water as transparent as glass. It is 1600 by 600 cubits and deep enough to be full of water even in the dry months of the year. A story is told about the digging of this tank. An

old woman lived near the site of the tank. She had a son whose name also was Sitaram. One day while Raja Sitaram was passing by this place, the old woman happened to be calling her son by name. The Raja took it, out of fun, to be a call to him. He went up to her and asked her why she had called him. She informed him of the scarcity of water in the locality. At once the king had a tank dug. When it was being dug, hidden treasure was discovered. Sitaram did not take it for himself, but spent all the treasure in making a *Dighi* out of the small tank.

Sitaram now began to strengthen himself. As we have already said, soldiers flocked to his standard, specially, as the means of livelihood by robbery did not exist any longer. Sitaram knew that he would attract the attention of the local military officers if he got weapons from outside; so he began to encourage arts

and industries, and skilled workers were attracted to the capital. Amongst these there were blacksmiths who could make large cannon, cannon-balls and sharp swords. Their descendants are still expert blacksmiths. Two of Sitaram's guns were called *Kalay Khan* and *Jhum Jhum Khan*.

Sitaram was now bent upon extending his dominions. He already won the hearts of his subjects by his loving rule. Moreover, as his dominions were free from attacks of robbers, subjects of other Zemindars flocked to his lands. Sitaram gradually occupied Satrajitpur, Muhammad-shahi Pargana, Mugura, a part of modern Pabna, and the Pargana of Nashib-shahi (about 1690 A. D.). Sitaram had to fight several small battles with some rebellious chiefs as the chief of Rampal, and the Raja of Chanchal. In short, Sitaram's lands extended from the north of the Padma to the borders of the Bay of Bengal. His income was very large,

but the amount cannot be ascertained now.

Having thus acquired extensive lands Sitaram began to rule with an eye to the good of the people. He was an ideal Hindu ruler. He was never exacting, and he always spent his revenues in the interests of the country. By cultivation on a large scale, he was able to reduce the price of rice. He encouraged trade and the various arts and industries flourished under his patronage. The supply of water had always been most inadequate to the needs of the people and Sitaram deserves the gratitude of the country for an improvement in this matter. It is said that he had a band of 2000 men armed with spades under an able leader, Madan Basu by name, whose usual duty was to excavate tanks. We have already referred to a few of these tanks. Sitaram was also a patron of learning. He used to maintain many

Pandits by Jaigirs. *Tols* were opened and all branches of Sanskrit learning were taught including Ayurveda and Astrology. As a ruler, Sitaram did not forget his Mussalman subjects. For them, he established *muktabs* (corresponding to *tols*) under able Moulavis, who were highly respected by the Hindus and honoured with high posts under the Government.

So much for the material side of Sitaram's rule. Nor did he neglect the spiritual side, for he knew that man does not live by bread alone. He was very religious ; we have already seen how he built many temples to Hindu gods and goddesses and made provision for their regular worship.

Now comes the last and most glorious chapter of Sitaram's life. Having thus consolidated his kingdom, Sitaram began to think of actual independence. The harsh Mughal rule had already made itself unpopular, so he had public opinion in

his favour. With the connivance of the Mughal rulers of Bengal he had gathered a large army and had grown powerful. Sitaram's first step towards independence was to refuse to pay taxes of the Faujdar (military keeper) of the fort of Bhushanah. This enraged the Faujdar, and he wanted to punish Sitaram. There were several skirmishes, and at last the two hostile armies met on the bank of a small river ; a regular battle followed and the Faujdar fell. The fort of the Bhushanah was seized by Sitaram. He knew that a collision with the Mughals was now sure and he began to prepare for it. He waited in Bhushanah and placed Muhammadpur in charge of his famous general, Ramrup.

Murshid Kuli Khan, the Subadar of Bengal at the time, now proceeded to take steps to punish Sitaram. A new Faujdar was appointed and sent with troops to recover the fort. A notice was also sent round to the Zemindars warning

them against helping Sitaram in any way. The threat had its effects. The Zemindars began to waver. Sitaram however, was not the man to shrink from his task. He resolved to fight alone.

The Subadar's troops were in two divisions; one was placed under Sangram Sinha, and the other under another Hindu leader, Dayaram Roy, the founder of the present Raj family of Dighapatia. Sangram was moving by water towards Bhushanah. Sitaram checked his advance and defeated him. Unable to occupy the fort Sangram laid seige to it. On the other hand, Dayaram Roy proceeded towards Muhammadpur. As we know, this place was defended by the giant hero Ramrup who struck terror into the heart of all by his stature and awe-inspiring courage. Moreover he was an expert soldier and a man of large heart and exceptional character. This endeared him to his soldiers, who would unhesitat-

ingly lay down their lives for him. The fort of Muhammadpur again, was so well defended by guns that Dayaram began to despair of victory. He, therefore planned to have Ramrup murdered by assassins.

It was the habit of Ramrup to sleep at night under the portico and to rise early. The assassins knew that they would not be able to overpower him when he was armed, even if he were alone. So they lay in wait and one foggy morning, they came up from behind and struck him with a spear. He fell to the ground and was writhing with pain when they severed

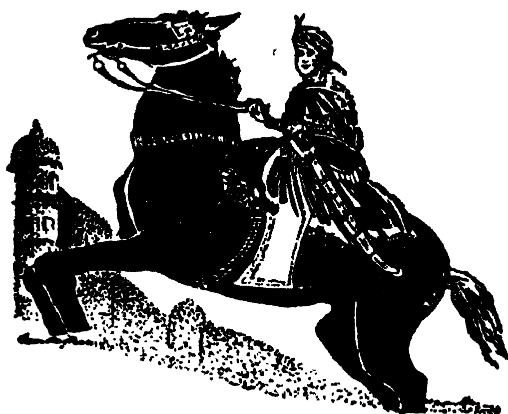


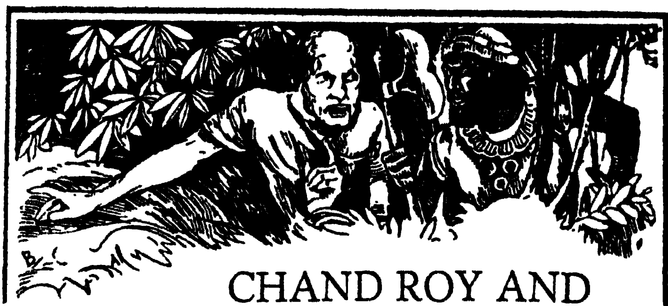
Ramrup's cruel murder.

his large head from the body. Dayaram sent the head to the Nawab in the hope that he would be pleased. When the Nawab saw the large head he said. "A man like that should have been taken alive, not dead."

To return to the story. When news of the murder of his general reached Sitaram, his hopes were dashed to the ground. He had depended completely on the bravery and tact of Ramrup. It was now clear to Sitaram that it would not be possible to defend both the forts. Leaving a few defenders in the fort of Bhushanah he secretly marched out with the rest for Muhammadpur. When he reached the place, the Mughal troops were just moving from the out-skirts towards the heart of the town. Sitaram could easily have made peace now. But as a true hero he preferred to lose everything save honour. Hence he thought it his duty to fall, if need be,

like a hero. Many bloody battles were fought with the Mughals, but Sitaram steadily lost ground till he was wounded and captured. Thus fell Sitaram, the last Hindu hero. There are many conflicting accounts of the actual death of the King. According to some, he was condemned to death and beheaded; according to others, he died in prison.





CHAND ROY AND KEDAR ROY

YOU have already seen in the tale of Pratapaditya how Raja Man Sinha became Subadar of Bengal, Behar and Orissa (1589). Before his time the Pathans had begun to rebel in Behar and Orissa, and the Bhowmiks (called Bhunya) had tried to become independent in Bengal. These Bhunya chiefs appeared in Akbar's reign about the middle of the 16th century ; they fell in the reign of Jahangir, Akbar's son. The history of these chiefs is one of the glories of Bengal.

Their heroism was signal and every home in Bengal still rings with the fame of their feats. You know that Pratapa-

ditya of Jessore was one of these chiefs. *Chand Roy* and *Kedar Roy* of Bikrampur were two others.

They were brothers who flourished towards the end of the 16th century. The provincial Mughal governors were very cruel and oppressive. Hence these brothers stopped paying revenues and proclaimed themselves independent. Their capital Sripur, lay a few miles away from Sonargaon in the Bikrampur *Pargana.* The lands of Bikrampur had many rivers. This made it easy for the Roy brothers to move about and harass the Mughal outposts.

An event now took place which is said to have broken the heart of the elder brother Chand Roy. Isha Khan, a provincial governor, was friendly with Kedár Roy. It is said that once he was invited to Kedar Roy's palace and was entertained right royally. But unhappily the Mussalman chief saw Kedar Roy's widowed

daughter, Sonamani. Her exquisite beauty made him fall in love with her. He demanded the girl for his harem. As a Hindu, this demand was outrageous to the father and Kedar Roy attacked the fort of Kalagachi held by Isha Khan and razed it to the ground. Isha Khan took shelter in the fort of Tribeni, which was also attacked. Kedar Roy next began to plunder Khijri, the province over which Isha Khan ruled. While he was thus busy, one of his ministers, Srimanta Khan, who had an ancient grudge against him, was plotting to dishonour him. Won over by a secret and costly present, Srimanta contrived so cleverly to hand over Sonamani to Isha Khan that nothing leaked out till it was too late to prevent the treacherous act. This shock was too much for Chand Roy and it broke his heart.

But Kedar Roy, the father, was made of sterner stuff. The shock gave his

energies a new turn, He continued to harass Isha Khan and his province. He began to feel that the honour of the Hindus could be secured only by cutting off all connection with the Mughals. Hence he assumed independence and attacked Sandwip.

Kedar Roy had a fleet of *Koshas* (large ships). His trained sailors included many Portuguese Feringhee and two Portuguese naval officers, Carvalho and his mate Martin. They wrested Sandwip from the Mughal, and Kedar Roy long held possession of this land. He was now at the height of his power. At this time Raja Man Sinha was sent to Bengal to put down these Bhunyas.

As soon as Man Sinha came to Bengal he began to play one Bhunya chief off against the other. The policy has been always the bane of unity in Bengal. And it succeeded as Man Sinha desired. The chiefs became bitter enemies of one

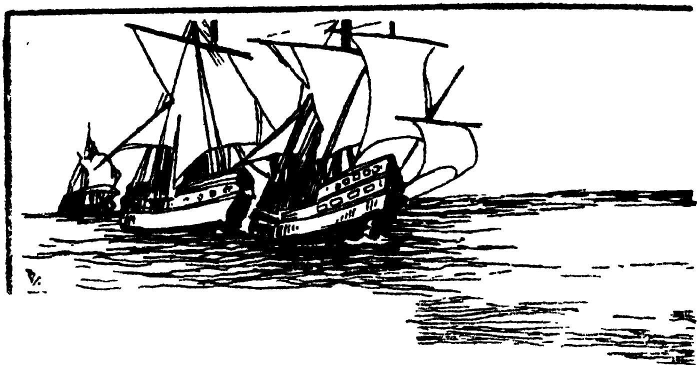
another. Moreover, there were certain base men who began to help Man Sinha actively, indicating to him secret paths and the best mode of directing his troops. The Bhunya chiefs, one by one, submitted to the Mughals. Only two of them stood out bravely ; one was Pratapaditya of Jessore and the other Kedar Roy of Bikrampur.

Man Sinha had a false notion of Bengali heroism. He was surprised at the sturdy opposition of Pratapaditya and Kedar Roy. The Bengalis then had a love of freedom which gave the courage in their hearts and strength in their arms. Man Sinha found to his cost that he had caught Tartars. You will recall what happened to Pratapaditya. Once again the huge Mughal army sent by Man Sinha had to retreat. It could not withstand the attack of Kedar Roy of Bikrampur. This rout brought Man Sinha to his senses, and he revised his

opinion about Bengal and her heroic sons.

Man Sinha now played another card. Having been defeated on land, he began to prepare for a naval fight. A fleet of a hundred ships, manned by picked Mughal sailors under an able admiral, Mandary, was sent by the river Padma towards Sripur, the capital city of Bikrampur. Kedar Roy had been informed of the expedition by spies. He sent word from village to village calling upon men to take up arms in the cause of freedom. The call was not in vain, but found ready response in recruits and supplies. He fitted out a fleet and placed it under the able lead of Madhu Roy and Carvalho. Not long ago Bengalis were not only skilled soldiers, but also heroic sailors.

The home fleet patiently waited for the enemy. Soon Man Sinha's fleet was seen and the fleets closed with each other and an obstinate struggle resulted. Nature



Man Sinha's fleet.

even seemed to join in the fury of the battle. A storm raged and lightning flashed when the two parties met. Above the din of battle the war-cries of the Mughals, "*Allah ho Akbar*" and of the Hindus, "*Jaya ma Kali*" were heard. It was a magnificent fight—a struggle for mastery between independence and ambition. At last the Mughals wavered and the Bengalis won the day. The Mughals had lost their admiral. Kedar Roy's admirals, Madhu Roy and the Portuguese Carvalho, though struck by an arrow, fought with great bravery. This naval



Kedar Roy's fleet.

fight will ever find a place in the annals of Bengal ; even foreign historians make mention of it. It lives in the folklore of Bikrampur, and so signal was the victory that tradition attributes the success to the help given by the goddess *Bhagavati*.

When the news of this defeat reached Man Sinha, he took steps to reduce Kedar Roy to submission. He marched towards Sripur and encamped near the city. It is reported that Man Sinha sent a messenger

with a letter to Kedar Roy in which he boasted of his feats. In the letter he styled himself "the lion of war". Raja Kedar Roy retorted humorously but spiritedly "A lion is no better than a beast after all, even though he may live in a cave on a high cliff."

Man Sinha laid siege to Sripur. Kedar Roy was not taken by surprise, A bloody fight raged for nine days without any decisive result. Man Sinha recognised the heroism of the Bengalis, but by force or guile the enemy had to be crushed. He was at last helped by the treacherous Srimanta Khan in a plot to assassinate Kedar Roy. It is said that when after nine days of hard fighting Kedar Roy went into the temple of his guardian goddess and was absorbed in deep meditation, an assassin beheaded him. According to another account, he was severely wounded in the battle and died soon after he was brought as a captive before

Man Sinha. It is fairly well established as a fact that treachery played an important part in the fall of Kedar Roy.

As a hero, Kedar Roy may be marked with Pratapaditya, though the latter has perhaps won greater renown. In naval warfare Kedar Roy was Pratap's superior.

As rulers, the two brothers Chand Roy and Kedar Roy brought about immense improvements in Bikrampur. But the most lasting benefit which they conferred upon Bengal was the rousing of the consciousness that great patriots and heroes lived and moved and had their being amongst Bengalis.





MUKUNDA ROY

THIS story deals with Raja Mukunda Roy of Bhushanah, another famous Bhunya chief. He was one of those powerful *Zemindars* of the sixteenth century who carried themselves as independent rulers, defying the Emperors or their Viceroys, and even at times taking the field against them. Muhammedan historians make mention of these chiefs.

Mukunda Roy lived at Bhushanah within the Fatehabad division. The place was generally known as Bhushanah Mahmudpur. This place is now but a shadow of its once prosperous self. Even to-day the remains of Bhushanah and

Mahmudpur are seen on the east and the west banks of the river Madhumati. Formerly these two places were not divided by any river. It is probable that later the adjacent river Gorai being deflected gave rise to the Madhumati which came to flow between Bhushanah and Mahmudpur. Such freak rivers are not uncommon in Bengal. Thus the river Padma gave rise to the river Kirtinasha and this river divided Bikrampur into two.

Fatehabad is said to have been a marshy tract formed after the sea had receded. It was at first quite unfit for cultivation being for the greater part bog and jungle. A Mughal ruler of Sandwip named Fateh Ali turned it into habitable land, and the place was named after him.

It is not known how the ancestors of Mukunda Roy came to live in the place. They were known to be highly connected. Mukunda Roy was at first only a land-holder, but afterwards by his genius and

tact he grew to be a first-rate Zemindar, a Bhunya, who did not fear to rise in arms against the Mussalman rulers.

About the year 1570 A. D. Fatehabad was under Morad Khan, an officer of Dayud Khan, the Pathan Subadar of Bengal. The Pathans were at this time defeated by Akbar's army, and Morad with a few other officers went over to the Mughal conqueror. But on the death of the Mughal general, Hossain Kuli Khan, a Pathan general, Katlu Khan, began to harass the Mughals and their Pathan allies. Morad, undoubtedly was one of the objects of Katlu Khan's wrath. When Katlu Khan was contemplating an attack upon Fatehabad, Morad died. Mukunda Roy was even then a petty Zemindar, but he had been very intimate with Morad, so he tried his best to help Morad's sons to resist Katlu Khan.

When Katlu Khan attacked Fatehabad, Mukunda's forces joined those of

Morad in a brave opposition. It happened that the Mughal general, Muzaffar, entered Bengal with a strong army in order to attack Katlu Khan. This combined attempt proved too much for the Pathans, and they retreated into Orissa.

When Raja Todar Mall, Akbar's famous finance minister, who was at the time the Chief Commander of the Mughal army in Bengal and Governor of Bengal, Behar and Orissa, came to learn that Mukunda Ray had taken active steps to help the Mughals against the Pathans, he was highly pleased. In recognition of these services, Todar Mall gave Mukunda Roy the title of Raja and entrusted him with the administration of the province, instead of setting up a Muhammedan ruler.

Raja Mukunda Roy was noble-hearted. Out of gratitude for Morad, the former ruler of the province, he set apart

sufficient lands to support in comfort the family of Morad. This and other measures made him very popular in the land.

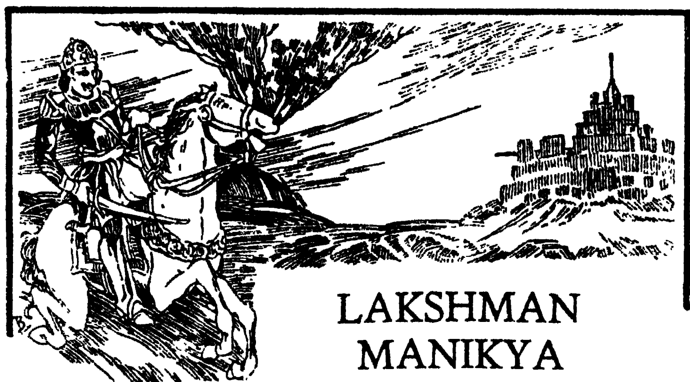
Raja Mukunda Roy did not long enjoy peace. After Todar Mall, several governors of Bengal followed one another in quick succession, but there was no alteration in the arrangement made by Todar Mall regarding Fatehabad, for Mukunda Roy had proved a very able ruler. He was there in his glory even when Man Sinha came as Governor for the first time. But when on the recall of Man Sinha, Syad Khan became the temporary Governor of Bengal, this man, on some pretext, deposed Mukunda Roy and appointed a Mussalman ruler in his stead.

This was a bolt from the blue, for which the Raja was not at all prepared. But the heart of a hero always beats true. He rose to the occasion and refused to resign his governorship of

Fatehabad as demanded by the Mughal Viceroy. A tussle was the result. Mukunda Roy's bravery routed the enemy. But Syad Khan gathered a formidable army and again attacked Mukunda Roy. Mukunda Roy was defeated and he died a heroe's death on the bloody battle field of Fatehjungpur (a Pargana of the present Madaripur Sub-division).

The great Raja was also famous as a kind ruler who spread peace over his land. His gifts of rent-free lands to deserving persons were a notable feature of his rule.





LAKSHMAN MANIKYA

LAKSHMAN Manikya of Bhulua was yet another of twelve Bhunyas who flourishsd in the reign of Akbar and who made such a strong bid for the independence of Bengal. His extensive dominions were in the province of Bhulua on the east bank of the Meghna. It was situated within the present district of Noakhali.

The south-eastern parts of lower Bengal were at first covered by the waters of the Bay of Bengal. The water gradually receded and *chars* (dried up shoals and sand banks formed of alluvial deposits) were formed which afterwards became inhabited. Bhulua was a *char*

of this type. An interesting story is told regarding the origin of Bhulua. It is said that Biswambhar Sur, belonging to the same clan as Adisur of Mithila, was once going in a barge on a pilgrimage to Holy Chandranath. All his family were with him. When crossing the terrible Meghna they had to pass a night on the river. In the darkness of the night they could not make out the direction of the bank. All were overcome with fear and began to pray for divine help. Towards the small hours of the morning Biswambhar Sur dozed. In his slumber he dreamt that a goddess appeared before him and addressing him said, "Fear not my child, the dawn is not far off, and with its apperance the limitless expanse of water will be nowhere. Then your barge will run aground. Get out of it, dig up the sand a little, and you will discover a stone image of me. If you raise it and set it up with due rites, you

will be the Lord of the land and your descendants for generations will rule over it. If however, you disregard my command and try to leave the place, you are sure to come to grief." Then the goddess disappeared and the dreamer also awoke.

He hastened to recount his dream to the Brahmins present, who took it as a very good omen and blessed the dreamer. Soon after day dawned and to the great delight of all, the dream came true. Water was seen only in the distance, and round them there was dry land. The barge had stuck fast in the sand.

This miracle made all grateful to the benign goddess, and they at once set about digging up the sand. They had not dug far before a stone-image of goddess came in view. The raptures of the party knew no bounds. They consecrated the image that very day, though it was very foggy and the sun was obscured all the day long. Next morning it

cleared and it was found that the goddess faced the east, which images of Hindu deities never do. It was evidently a mistake due to the foggy weather, but it was too late to correct it. Hence to commemorate this mistake, as it were, the place was called *Bhulua,* or the place where a mistake was committed.

Whatever be the truth of the story, it undoubtedly shows the piety of the Sur family and their confidence in divine help. Raja Lakshman Manikya came of this noble Sur family. As already hinted, this Sur family was different from the family, founded by Adisur of Bengal. Lakshman Manikya's family claimed to be Kshattriyas of Mithila, who afterwards got incorporated with the Kayastha caste.

Raja Lakshman was a direct descendant of Biswambhar Sur. The spirit of Lakshman first declared itself in a social matter. Finding it inconvenient to enter

into marriage relations with the Kshattriyas of his native land, he made bold to enter into ties with the local Kayasthas. He married his daughter to a Kayastha. The son-in-law, however, was outcasted by his society. To remedy this injustice Lakshman Manikya won over the four acknowledged heads of the Kayastha society, Pratapaditya of Jessore, his son-in-law Raja Ramchandra of Chandradwip, Kedar Roy of Bikrampur, and Mukunda Roy of Bhushanah. Those who still persisted in keeping aloof were themselves outcasted. This shows how resolute and tactful Lakshman Manikya was.

During Lakshman's rule the Arrakanese Mugs (of whom you have heard in previous tales) became very powerful and were ravaging the coast of the Bay of Bengal. Thus Hindus of the locality considered their life and property quite insecure at the time. About the year 1548 A. D. the Mugs had depopulated

many flourishing provinces. Those who lived in those infested areas were looked down upon as outcasts by the remaining sections of the Hindu community. This was a highly undesirable state of affairs.



Arrakanese Mugs.

The soft heart of Lakshman Manikya was touched and he tried to check the pirates. But they were already in possession of Sandwip island and raided even Bhulua at times. The Raja's efforts were at first successful. He drove off

these organised pirates on three occasions, but in the end his younger brother, Ramanuja out of a mean greed for the Raja's lands, sought the help of the Arrakanese in driving Lakshman Manikya out of Bhulua. In spite of his heroic stand Lakshman was defeated by the combined army.

Finding no other way of redress he asked help of Isha Khan of Khijirpur. Isha Khan was a Pathan ; he had been once defeated by Man Sinha and taken to Delhi. Akbar was so pleased with the reports of his heroism given by Man Sinha, that he conciliated him by not only setting him free, but also appointing him ruler of Sonargaon. Isha Khan, therefore, was a pro-Mughal and was not on good terms with the *Bhunyas,* who were all enemies of the Mughals. Lakshman knew all this, but he had no alternative left open to him but that of seeking his help.

Isha Khan at once sent despatches to the Mughal Emperor, Akbar, regarding the depredations of the Mugs. In reply, Akbar sent instructions to the commànder of the troops in Bengal to stop these raids. Though the Bhunyas were not in good terms with the Emperor, they eagerly responded to the call of the Mughal Viceroy and combined on this occasion with the Mughal army against their common enemy.

This allied army attacked "Kasba" town, a stronghold of the Mugs that lay within the province of Bhulua. It was here that the Mugs had built a fort after driving out Lakshman Manikya. A fierce battle followed in which Lakshman Manikya rendered distinguished service. The Arrakanese were defeated and fell back upon the fort of Sandwip. Bhulua once more came under Lakshman Manikya. Lakshman Manikya's first act on recovering his kingdom was to reward all

who fought for him with gifts of rent-free land. Their descendants to this day enjoy these gifts. Certain Portuguese also who had helped him in the battle were not forgotten when he distributed his munificent rewards. Lakshman Manikya also did not fail to provide amply for the worship of the tutelary goddess whose image had been discovered in the sand.

The Raja then tried to make Bhulua the centre of attraction for the better classes of Hindu society. He succeeded in his attempt. It is said that Lakshman Manikya came into some conflict with Raja Ramchandra of Chandradwip who suddenly appeared with a fleet and attacked Bhulua. Lakshman Manikya rashly went out to meet him and was captured and beheaded. This account is probably not true. But it is quite possible that he did not get on well with Ramchandra and that they had frequent tussles.

Another and a more probable account is that he fell fighting when the Bhunya chiefs in 1601 fought side by side with Mughals against the Mugs on the island of Sandwip. He has left behind him a glorious record of Bengali heroism. Lakshman Manikya was famous not only as a hero but a scholar and a poet of a very high order.





ISHA KHAN

YOU have now read accounts of many Bhunya chiefs of Bengal, all of whom were Hindus. I shall now tell you of a Pathan Bhunya who was noted for his prowess and patriotism. This is Isha Khan Masnad-i-Ali of Khijirpur.

Isha Khan was the son of a Rajput merchant of Oudh who was converted to Muhammedanism when he came to Bengal for trade. He afterwards managed to secure some lands near Sonargaon and lived there. He often used to stop the payment of imperial revenues, and hence the provincial governors often sent an army against him. He was at last totally

defeated in a bloody battle and had to come to terms. But soon after he revolted. This revolt was put down and he was sentenced to death.

His son Isha Khan inherited the fighting spirit of his father. After the death of Sulaiman Karanani, the famous governor of Bengal Isha Khan entered the army and by his talent rose quickly to be a superior officer. During Dayud's governorship he was a distinguished military officer and he fought very gallantly with the Mughals at the battle of Akmahal where Dayud fell. Many of Dayud's followers came over to him. Isha Khan with their help established himself at Sonargaon with Khijirpur as his capital.

According to some accounts, after his father's death Isha Khan was sold as a slave, but was ransomed by his uncle Kutab Khan, who was in the good graces of the Mughal general, Taj Khan. Isha

Khan also gradually recovered his father's lands.

Isha Khan's character was not spotless. We have seen how he behaved with his friends, Chand Roy and Kedar Roy. He was very clever but rather unscrupulous. He often submitted to the Mughal Emperor and as often again raised the standard of revolt when occasion presented itself. But his patriotism, love of independence and real courage almost made up for these defects of character. He had a personal magnetism and his heroic appearance was much admired by all at the time.

This was the time when the Pathans were struggling with the Mughals for supremacy in Bengal. Bengal had actually come under Mughal rule during Akbar's reign ; but he could not bring it under complete control without much loss of men and money. The Pathan chiefs were not weak. They were able by their

united efforts to keep Bengal for a long time from the grasp of the Mughals. As we have seen, the Hindu chiefs also helped them much.

Aware of this source of trouble in Bengal, the Mughal sovereigns had to send Viceroys and troops from time to time to keep the rebel chiefs in check. It must not be supposed that the Mughals always succeeded in their efforts. On the contrary, they were often driven out of Bengal to make room for Pathan rulers. When defeated, the Pathans used to hide themselves in woody or hilly regions.

At this time the Pathan opposition was led by Massum Kabuli and Isha Khan of Khijirpur. The Mughal army was under Shahabaj Khan. In 1585 Shahabaj Khan went in a ship to Sonargaon and summoned Isha Khan to appear before him. Isha Khan did not attend in person, but sent one of his officers with offers of submission to the Mughal sovereign.

This was no doubt a trick on the part of Isha Khan. The Mughal General grew suspicious and in order to test Isha Khan's sincerity asked him to surrender Massum, who was a rebel and had taken refuge in



his Court. Isha Khan took no notice of the demand. Shahabaj thereupon laid siege to Khijirpur. The fort was seized together with the arsenal and store of Isha Khan. Isha Khan managed to flee from the place. Being helpless, Massum took shelter in a small island in the river

Brahmaputra, where, *with his followers*, he had to face starvation. Isha Khan, however, was not idle during this time. He was collecting men and provisions and came to the help of Massum. Massum took heart and attempted to stop the advance of Mughal troops.

The Mughal General, seeing that the Pathan army was swelling, encamped at Totak on the Brahmaputra, and after fortifying the place awaited the attack of the enemy. There were several fights which the Mughals won, but they could not crush the power of the Pathans. Shahabaj Khan was now on the banks of a tributary of the Brahmaputra. It was the rainy season but as the rains were not heavy, no great inconvenience was felt by the Mughal troops. Isha Khan very cleverly had fifteen small canals dug and diverted the waters upon the Mughal encampment. The Mughals with difficulty saved their lives and ammunition.

The Pathans seized the opportunity, and fell upon the enemy. But as ill luck would have it, the leader of the Pathan-division was shot dead by the Mughals, and at once confusion prevailed in the Pathan ranks.

Isha Khan's plans were upset. He again offered submission through a Mughal captive. His terms were accepted this time. A military outpost was to be established at Sonargaon, Massum was to leave Bengal for good, and Isha Khan was to be regular in his payment of revenues.

Shahabaj, as before, did not trust Isha Khan. He, therefore, tarried there for some time. A year passed and yet Isha Khan did not fulfil the conditions of the treaty. A new conflict was imminent when there was a rupture among the leaders of the Mughal army. Thus his work was left unfinished. After him Man Sinha came to Bengal as Subadar

and after reducing Orissa he turned his attention to Bengal.

The defeated Pathan chiefs of Orissa joined Massum Kabuli and Isha Khan of Bengal. Man Sinha defeated the Pathans, but this defeat had no permanent effect. All was confusion when Man Sinha went back to Ajmer for a time and he had to hasten back to Bengal. Here he put down several revolts ; but all to no purpose, for these only strengthened Isha Khan, as the defeated Pathans flocked to this able leader.

Man Sinha, therefore, felt that it was impossible to secure peace in Bengal until Isha Khan was subdued. So he proceeded promptly against him and laid siege first to Ekdala and then to Egarsindhu. Isha Khan held out very bravely. His resistance won the heart of the Rajput hero, who now entered into a treaty with Isha Khan.

One account gives a slightly different

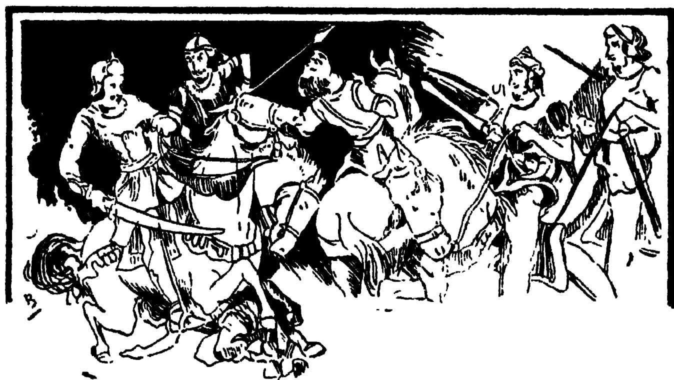
version of the matter. It is said that during the siege Man Sinha lost his son-in-law in an action. Following the old laws of chivalry he summoned Isha Khan to a duel. Isha Khan accepted the challenge. Both were expert swordsmen and the lists rang with the clashing of their swords. For a long time neither of the combatants gained a distinct advantage over the other. At length Man sinha's sword broke into pieces. The noble Isha Khan at once desisted from the duel and left the lists after handing over his weapon to Man Sinha. Isha was too chivalrous to take advantage of his opponen'ts sad plight. This generosity made Man Sinha his fast friend.

Whatever be the actual details of the incident which brought about Man Sinha's alliance with Isha Khan, it is a fact that Man Sinha took him to Delhi and gave him the *Zemindary* of 24 Parganas and the title of Masnad-i-Ali. It must

be said to the credit of the noble Isha Khan that henceforth he remained loyal to the Mughal Government. He died in 1599.

Isha had the reputation of being a wise ruler. Under his rule many canals and tanks were excavated. This not only secured a supply of water, but also facilitated communication and helped the cultivation of the province. It is said that famine was unknown during his rule and that rice used to sell at four maunds per rupee. The taxes imposed by him were very light.

In addition to his activity against the Mughals he attacked and drove out Lakshman, a Koch (a native of Cooch Behar), who was ruling near Jangalbari and had a fort. Isha was both a hero and diplomat.



KANDARPA ROY & RAMCHANDRA ROY OF BAKLA

ANY account of the Bhunyas of Bengal which leaves untold the story of Kandarpa Roy and his son Ramchandra must be an incomplete one.

Kandarpa Roy belonged to the royal family of Chandradwip and was a lineal descendant of the famous Danujamardan. He ruled gloriously for about 15 years at Bakla and had his capital at Madhabpasha (Barisal). As you know, Bengal was suffering from the incursions of Mugs and Feringhee and from civil strife amongst the Bhunya Chiefs. Kandarpanarayan fought several times with these

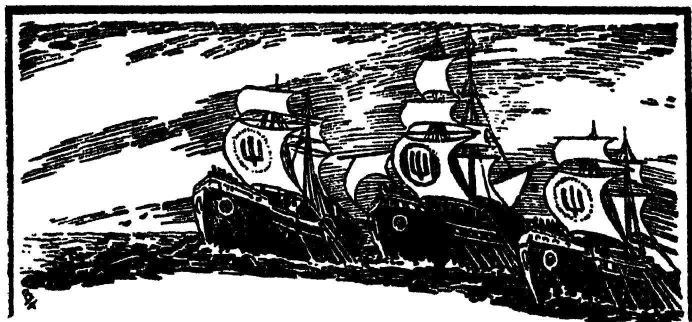
pirates and brought peace to the land. Lakshman Manikya of Bhulua was jealous of the power of Kandarpa and, as a result, conflicts followed. He was, however, on terms of the closest intimacy with the great Pratapaditya.

A few of Kandarpa's heroic achievements may be briefly mentioned. He took an active part in the naval battle of Sandwip (1584), and rendered brilliant service to his side. He also helped Shahabaj Khan much in his conflict with Massum Kabuli. It was he who inflicted a crushing defeat on the Pathan army at Hossainpur. Though at first he fought for the Mughal sovereign he afterwards made common cause with the Bhunyas and tried to secure the independence of Bengal. But he died soon after he had joined in this struggle.

On his death his minor son Ramchandra became king. He had married a daughter of Pratapaditya, but did not get

on well with his father-in-law and so when Pratap was fighting with Man Sinha, he sided with the latter. He also quarrelled with Lakshman Manikya regarding the possession of some island in the *Meghna* between Bhulua and Chandradwip. Ramchandra was not a hero ; he shone only with borrowed lustre. He is now remembered as the son of Kandarpanarayan and the son-in-law of Pratap rather than as a spirited Bhunya chief.

Dear children, I have been so long telling you tales of heroes who lived in fairly modern times. I now intend to tell you the tale of a hero who flourished when Hindu and Buddhist kings reigned in India. I dare say you know the name of this famous man ; it is Bijoy Sinha.

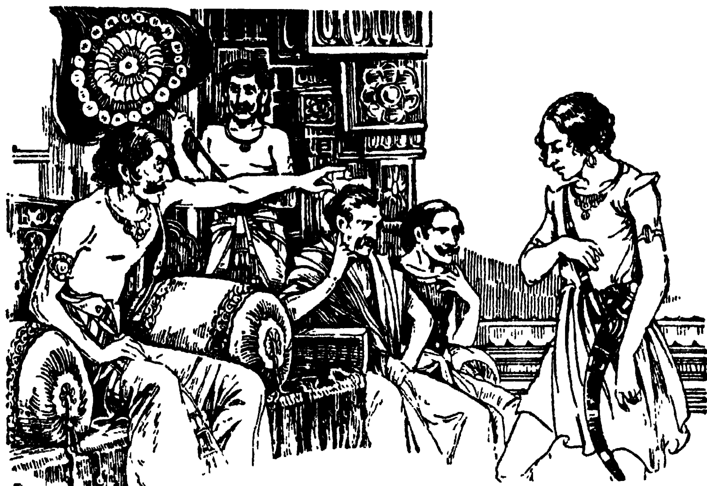


BIJOY SINHA

VERY little light has been thrown upon the early history of Bengal. We do not know for certain when the Hindus occupied it, but we can say confidently that they have been in possession of it for not less than three thousand years. Most probably they first occupied Behar and then gradually spread over Bengal and conquered it. Strangely enough the first account of Bengal is gleaned from the history of Ceylon. During the time of Buddha there reigned in Bengal a king, Sinhabahu by name. His eldest son is said to have been a very wild young man quite unlike his father who was a God-fearing king. He oppressed

his father's subjects. Unable to tame the youth by gentle admonitions, Raja passed sentence of banishment upon him.

This was just the schooling for such an indomitable spirit. Bijoy Sinha's pent up energy had, for want of a suitable



outlet, been directed to the undesirable work of oppressing his father's subjects. Such spirits cannot live peacefully like ordinary men, but must seek adventurers ; then only are they in their element. Bijoy Sinha was not sad at the

thought of leaving home. He began to make preparations for a voyage to far-off Ceylon. In those days the art of ship-building was known in Bengal. Large sea-going ships, propelled with oars helped to establish an extensive commerce with distant countries. Choosing seven hundred adventurous youths like himself, Bijoy Sinha set sail for Ceylon. He had heard that it was a very prosperous and fertile country and that its raw products would be suitable commodities for export. He had also heard of gold mines in the country. He knew that this rich land was already held by some people, but the daring Bijoy Sinha determined to conquer them. He continued to sail southward inspite of difficulties which delayed his progress and dispirited his sailors. But the hero's heart never failed. He strove hard to keep his men in good humour and was confident that their labours would soon be rewarded. At last birds

came in sight and this was conclusive proof that land was not far off. Steadily the ships advanced under the personal direction of Bijoy Sinha, when lo ! the emerald-isle rose into view. The joy of the men on board knew no bounds.

The array of gallant vessels approaching the island attracted many sight-seers, young and old, to the shore. Little did they know that the ships bore their future conqueror and ruler. Bijoy Sinha was too clever to enter into immediate hostilities with the people or the king of the island. However, when he felt himself strong enough, he began his conquest of the island. A daring adventurer like Bijoy Sinha speedily completed this work and then ruled as an undisputed king of Ceylon. He proved an able ruler and founded a dynasty which reigned in Ceylon for over two thousand years, and which gave the name *Sinhala* to the island.

According to tradition Bijoy Sinha

landed in Ceylon in the year of Buddha's death (477 B. C.) which shows that the Aryan occupation of Bengal dates from the fifth century before Christ. Even at the early date the Hindus were great on both land and sea. They were so powerful and so civilised that they could invade distant lands. The sea-port, Tamralipta, the modern Tamluk in Midnapore, is known to have been a famous trade-centre at that time and to have attracted even European merchants.

Dear boys and girls, I trust, now that you have heard these tales, you will find it easy to form an idea of the noble heritage left us by our forefathers. In no period of the history of Bengal was she wanting in the heroic spirit. The essence of heroism as you have seen, lies in undaunted service in a noble cause. Follow in the wake of your ancestors, never flinch from duty and always exert yourselves in a good cause.



LAKSHMAN SEN

DEAR children, as you have listened eagerly to the tales already told, I shall add two more.

More than eight hundred years ago, there reigned in Gauda a king, named Ballal Sen. Perhaps you have heard of him, for it was he who reformed the various castes of Bengal. Lakshman Sen was his worthy son. So little is known of the early history of our province that it is often hard to get at the truth. Though it is admitted by most that Lakshman Sen was a man of ideal virtues, yet tradition has branded him as a

coward. This stigma is unmerited as you will soon see for yourselves.

Ballal Sen died before he could firmly establish his new kingdom. Lakshman Sen was not young when he came to the throne. He had already become famous for his virtues and his keen love of peace. He was known to have pardoned his enemies often and he tried even to win them to him. But, for all his love of peace, he was a heroic king who never shrank from war if duty forced it on him. Many pillars now in ruins testify to his victories over rival kings. He defeated the kings of Kanauj and Kalinga in bloody battles and the king of Kamrupa was also overawed by him.

So many glorious victories over mighty kings prove beyond doubt that Lakshman Sen was not a coward. He was a hero, but a hero for whom Fate proved too strong. The Sen dynasty to which Lakshman Sen belonged was actually an

alien line in Gauda. Moreover, it had overthrown the Pal dynasty which was very dear to the people. These two facts prevented Lakshman Sen from winning the full support of the people. Every one who came in touch with the noble-hearted king adored him, but others kept aloof. More than once, the king had been heard to cry. "O my people, if you don't want what is for your own good, who am I to thrust it upon you ?" This breach between the ruler and the ruled was responsible for Lakshman Sen's failure in life. But it made his heroic qualities shine all the more brightly.

When the internal condition of Gauda was such, a new danger threatened Lakshman Sen, already old and worn-out. Muhammad-i-Bukhtiar, a Turk of the Khilji dynasty, and a military adven turer came to hold two Parganas near the fort of Chunar, to the west of the river *Karmanasa*. Muhammad had a

regular army and gradually waxed strong and the fame of his courage spread. The Khilji Turks became his followers and even Kutobuddin, the Delhi Viceroy of Muhammad Ghori of Ghazni, encouraged him. This emboldened Bukhtiar who shortly after stormed the so-called fortress of Behar which was really a rich Buddhist monastery in South Behar.

It is said that the news of the storming of Behar reached the people of Gauda and created a panic there. A curious story is told of the conquest of Gauda. When the news of the fall of Behar spread in Gauda, a number of Brahmin astrologers waited upon King Lakshman Sen. They told him it was written in their old books that the country would pass to the Turks whose leader would be one with arms long enough to reach to the knees. They feared that the prophecy was now about to be fulfilled.

King Lakshman Sen, so the story runs, actually sent messengers to find out whether Bukhtiar had very long arms. And the messengers retorted that Bukhtiar had long arms. This news spread like wild fire and the Brahmins and the



merchants of Nadia fled. Lakshman Sen, however, though deserted by almost all, did not leave Nadia, but awaited his fate like a hero,

A year passed. Having collected an army Bukhtiar advanced towards Nadia,

leaving the main part of his army behind. With only eighteen horsemen he suddenly appeared at Nadia and passed through the gate of the City without rousing any one's suspicion. People took the party for horse-dealers. When he reached the gate of the palace, he ordered an attack.

Raja Lakshman Sen was at dinner then. The news of Bukhtiar's approach reached him only after Bukhtiar had already entered the palace. Being old, infirm and deserted and findidg no other alternative, he slipped out by a back door at his palace and made his way to East Bengal. Here he reigned for a very short time, for death soon overtook him.

Too much reliance cannot be placed in this account as it is purely traditional. It is unlikely that old Lakshman Sen would have been deserted by his minister and subjects, for all records say that he was a popular king and had trusted ministers who served him faithfully

through life. Moreover, he had at least two capable sons, Biswarupa and Keshab by name, as well as an efficient and disciplined army. It was with them that the Raja had started at one time from Benares on a successful campaign against Kamrupa. The fact seems to be this. When the news of Bukhtiar's conquest of Behar arrived, not only did the Brahmins and the merchants leave the country, but the old King also left on the advice of his panic-stricken ministers. He fell back upon Sonargaon in East Bengal and Bukhtiar, without opposition, occupied the deserted country. The king died before he could mature plans for resisting Bukhtiar. His sons instead of uniting to resist Bukhtiar quarrelled with each other and Bukhtiar soon made himself master of the whole of Bengal.

Thus even a heroic king can do very little for his country if the people do not love her and do not unite to defend her.



RAJA SASANKA

MUCH of our knowledge of the subject of the story is derived from the writing of the famous Sanskrit author, Banbhatta and of the Chinese traveller Hieun Tsang. He flourished towards the end of the sixth century A. D. and established a Gauda kingdom in the land of Rarh. His capital was Karna-subarna (Kansona) about twelve miles from the town of Murshidabad.

Sasanka belonged to the famous Gupta dynasty of Magadha. His father, Mahasen Gupta, though a descendant of the powerful monarch, Samudra Gupta, was the nominal ruler of Magadha and Bengal.

Much of his territory had been wrested from him. Aryabarta was independent, Panch-nad was under the sway of the rulers of Thaneswar (Sthaneswar) and Bengal used to give trouble, paying tribute only at her own sweet will.

Very little of the early life of this great hero has come to light. Tradition describes him as a red-haired youth of winning personality and soaring ambition. In his early youth he loved to listen to the glories of his ancestors, Samudra Gupta, Kumar Gupta and Skanda Gupta.

Raja Sasanka came suddenly into prominence on the death of Pravakarbardhan of Thaneswar (635 A. D.). Deva Gupta, King of Malava (Malwa), soon after Pravakar's death invaded Kanyakubja, the capital of Panchal which was under the rule of Graha Varma of the Maukhari dynasty. Graha was a son-in-law of Prabhakar. He was slain in battle and his wife, a daughter of Prabhakar, Rajya-

Sri by name, was thrown into prison. Thereupon Rajyabardhan, the eldest son of Prabhakar, now the ruler of Thaneswar marched against the king of Malava and easily defeated him.

But Rajyabardhan could not long enjoy peace, for Sasanka had succeeded his weak father and had grown mighty enough to oppose Rajyabardhan. The exact spot where Sasanka, the Gauda king, met Rajyabardhan is not known, but there is no doubt about the result. Sasanka, the young king, completely defeated Rajyabardhan and killed him.

Banbhatta and Hieun Tsang after him say that Rajyabardhan did not fall in battle, but, that he was decoyed by Sasanka into his camp and there cruelly assassinated. Sasanka's whole career gives the lie to such conduct. Moreover, Rajyabardhan was too wary and experienced a warrior to expose himself so foolishly to the enemy. The fact was

that elated with his success in the battle against the ruler of Malava, Rajyabardhan considered himself free from danger. He sent his general, Bhandi, back to Thaneswar with the spoils of war—elephants, horses and captives, and himself proceeded towards Kanyakubja to secure the release of his sister from prison.

Just before Kanyakubja, it seems, Rajyabardhan was confronted by Sasanka at the head of a powerful army. Rajyabardhan had with him not more than six or seven thousand horsemen. A battle followed in which Rajyabardhan was captured or surrendered himself ; he was not decoyed into Sasanka's camp and murdered in cold blood.

On the fall of Rajyabardhan, Kanyakubja fell into the hands of Sasanka, He left a Viceroy, Gupta by name. to rule the kingdom with orders to free Rajya-Sri and send her properly attended, where ever she wished. This chivalrous conduct,

though rare in the history of those cruel times, was worthy of Sasanka.



Sasanka sending Rajyasri.

Sasanka, however, did not reap the fruit of this victory, Rajyabardhan's younger brother Harshabardhan of historic fame ascended the throne of Thaneswar and vowed vengeance on Sasanka. He soon collected a large army and putting himself at its head invaded the Gauda kingdom. He advanced towards the east and fought against those petty kingdoms that refused to submit to

him. This meant for Harsha six years of hard and incessant fighting, but Sasanka was very little affected. The heroic king was strong enough to keep all foreign enemies at bay.

Peace, however, never fell to the lot of Sasanka. He was constantly engaged in quelling the revolts of his tributary kings and meeting the intrigues of Buddhist monks. Hieun Tsang tells us in his "Travels" that Sasanka, intolerant of Buddhism, drove the Buddhist monks from Kushinagar, tried to break the stone footprint of Buddha, preserved at Pataliputra, uprooted a Bodhi tree, destroyed an image of Buddha and ordered the image of Siva to be set up in its stead. The simple-hearted devout Chinese traveller even goes so far as to say that Sasanka on account of these desecrations was punished by God. His body was all covered with sores and his flesh rotted till at last he died.

But this historian is mistaken. Raja Saṣanka like many other Hindu kings was a model of toleration. He never took any steps to uproot Buddhism from Bengal, the dominion over which he had a special hold. But he oppressed the Buddhists of Mithila and Magadha for the very good reason that the Buddhist monks intrigued against him in favour of Harshabardhan and made several attempts to assassinate him. It was, therefore, only a politic step and not one prompted by intolerance.

With the passing away of Sasanka, disappeared another hero of Bengal whose brilliant career could do little for a country which had the canker of disunion in her.

